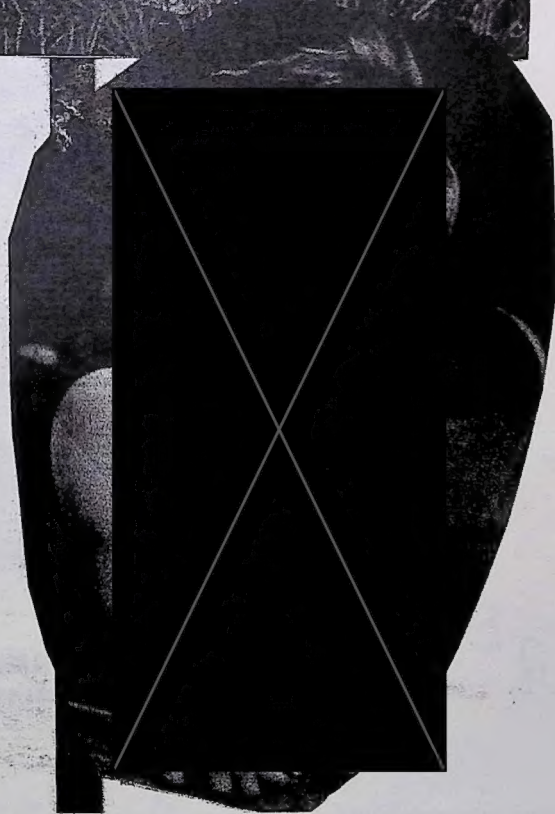
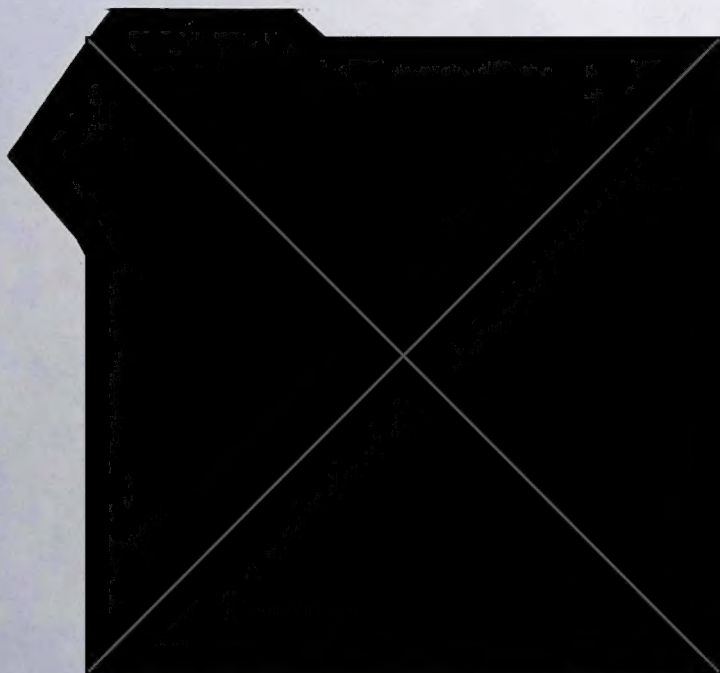


gretchen no. 9



I spend a lot of time avoiding eye contact with people in Wal-Mart, especially when I see certain relatives like my paternal aunt Faye. It's always awkward when I run into her because we never have anything to talk about except how my grandparents' health is failing & I "should come see them." But that's another story.



Yesterday I was hauling freight out of the cereal aisle when I heard my name being called. I turned to see my cousin Amie (9 months my junior) & her little boy Drake. ("The Drake.") I haven't seen them in probably close to a year, not because I've avoided my cousin on purpose, but because there's never enough time. Besides, she has the good job, the husband, the house, the kid, etc. Keep that thought in mind.

2

Amie is pregnant again & seeming to enjoy the role of wife & mother. Of course who knows if she's really happy or not.



My mom constantly drops hints that she wants me to have a child, or children. She's done so for many years now, and I always tell her that I don't plan on having any because anything related to ovaries or sperm or sex or growing up I don't like to discuss with my mother.

I'm 28 & by now the shock of seeing people I went to high school with children in tow has all but worn off. Now I wonder if there's something wrong with me because I don't particularly feel the urge to have a child or because I haven't had one yet.

When I hear women talk about how their biological clocks are ticking I can almost see inside of them, watching their eggs drivél up like the Wicked Witch of the East's legs under Dorothy's house. I'm kind of glad I've never felt that strongly about my eggs.

1 1

Don't get me wrong, babies are adorable little things. They smell nice & when they reach out & squeeze their tiny hands around your fingers it's heart-melting. I just don't know that I'm in a place in my life where I can be the kind of mother that I want to be, meaning my life is so unpredictable & my mind so flighty I don't know that I would want to bring a child into it. I'm heavily in debt & I get tired of my job every few years. I have more schooling to do, I want to sell my house, and the list goes on and on.

Then there's my mental state. I worry that being pregnant will change my body in ways that my brain can't handle. I'm afraid that I'll become so ashamed of myself that I won't allow anyone to look at me or touch me. Old habits die hard. I don't want to avoid mirrors again or starve myself or shut myself off from physical attention.

4

I don't want to put kids through the same kind of stress that comes with divorce. I don't know if I'm being overly optimistic or what, but I want to find someone with whom to spawn that I know is going to be with me for the long haul. Not someone that's wishy-washy about things. Someone who loves me and knows of all my many imperfections.



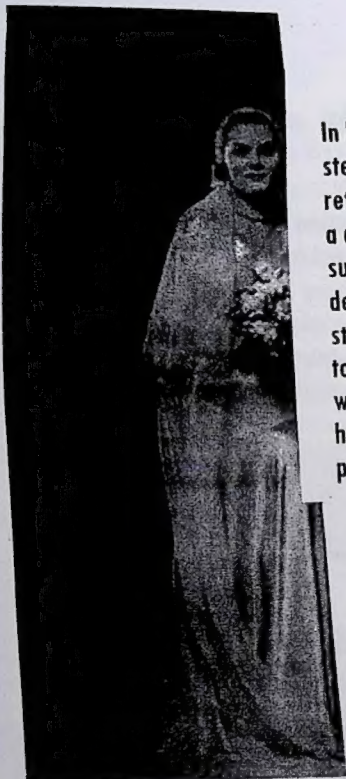
I also think a child might get lost under my weeping willow branches. I would worry way too much.

Too many people have children because they want someone to love them unconditionally. I can get that from a cat.

However, I don't want to be the "old cat lady" who lives alone in a dimly lit house watching The Price is Right & Court TV all day. Actually aside from the "old" and "alone" that doesn't sound so bad, but you know what I mean.

5





In November I got a call from my brother telling me that my stepfather was missing. He'd gone hunting & hadn't returned. Immediately I imaged Boyd lying on the ground in a dried pool of blood wearing his camouflage outfit surrounded by furry woodland creatures sniffing at his cold, dead body. The thought saddened me, because of the three stepfathers & one biological father I'd had he had seemed to care about me the most. When something at my house went wrong, like a few weeks before when my hot water heater had broken, he was the one who went to Lowe's and picked one up for me & then installed it.

According to David (my brother) Ma thought his disappearance was due to another woman. Even though David never liked Boyd we both thought that while he might've been a lot of things, he wasn't an adulterer. He & Ma always seemed to get along together. They'd just added a huge room onto their house with a jacuzzi. If he were going to have an affair, why would he do that, putting the both of them into more debt? It didn't make sense.

6







On Sunday afternoon, about three days after he had left for his "hunting trip" I learned that he'd reappeared. I'm thinking it was my brother who told me where he'd been but the exact wording of the conversation escapes me.

Ma was right; he'd been in the mountains with some lady. When I realized what that meant I felt a combination of wanting to cry, destroy things, & throw up all at once. While my mother & I don't have the best relationship the fact that Boyd was cheating on her sent me into protection mode. I wished that he had've been killed hunting at that moment because that would've been an accident, something no one could prevent. But him choosing to put my mother in pain & disrupt all of our lives, that was preventable.

Details that I didn't need to hear came out. Details that made me realize that I had been wrong about him. My internal people-gauging mechanism was broken. Boyd had gotten drunk on their wedding night & passed out before Ma even got a chance to wear her lingerie. He was an alcoholic & not a fun one. Boyd had been getting my younger step-brother Michael to lie for him, saying that they were together so that he could be with this woman, this... I called her at one point Dirty Sanchez because that's her last name. The worst thing was when my mom told me she never should've married him, that she didn't love him enough to marry him. She really did that to get over Alan. Alan = the biggest dork ever.



8

The next few months were difficult for me. They were way worse for Ma, but as far as I was involved I did the only thing I could do in the situation which was to listen to the daily events of what the private investigator had seen. My



mom seemed to be going out of her mind. It was difficult to listen to the way she spoke about things, almost as if there were some chance that he might break it off with the other woman. Almost as if she didn't think she could function or be happy without a man in her life.


That was the message I had picked up on subconsciously growing up. The message that has caused me much pain throughout the years. I told Ma to get a hobby, so she took up dance lessons. Things started to settle down a bit and then I learned that she had a "friend." Yes, a guy friend. In my head I'm thinking that it's way too soon for her to start hanging out with men, even if nothing's going on. I wouldn't dare say that though because I think she already knows.

I've now been taking Effexor for at least a year. My dosage has been upped once & I've started going to a psychiatrist instead of a doc in the box for prescriptions. There isn't much difference between the two, since my shrink isn't very thorough & lets me make my own decisions about how much and what medicine I take.

In the past year I've become a lot less anxious about things that normally would've set me off in a bad way, such as the hanging of teaching assignments this school year or being left alone while my boyfriend goes on tour with his band. Here are some things that even the medicine can't keep me from stressing out over.

I've had some problems with co-workers this year. I was moved into a class with Ms. McG who prior to me coming had requested that the other inclusion teacher be moved.






Now I have a schedule that realistically no inclusion teacher should have to follow if the system wants much productivity in a co-teaching environment. Three different science classes with three different teachers, eleventh grade English, and tenth grade English (two different teachers.) How could I possibly keep up with all the readings & know all the answers to all the study guides... and that's what Ms. McG thought I should be doing. She pitched a small fit when I asked for an answer key one day & from that point on whenever there was something that involved class work she made a big deal out of having to make an answer key for me. It's not like they didn't do much more in that class than talk about off-topic things anyway. The final straw with Ms. McG happened one day when I didn't come into the room because there was a sign on the door that said, "Do not disturb." So she came to my next period class, got me out of the room, & spoke to me as if I were a piece of shit that she'd just stepped on.

Needless to say I felt like that piece of shit, I felt like the kid being ridiculed in front of the class by the teacher for making a mistake that really wasn't a big deal.

I cried & left the room to write an email to the principals and my department head letting them know of the incident & how I had no intentions of going back into that class if that was her attitude. My whole body shook for an hour as I sat at my desk literally sobbing hysterically into my hands. Hello, panic attack.



Two days later, the day before my surgery, we had a meeting during which Ms. McG basically lied & said I didn't do anything. She seemed to forget that I was up walking

[REDACTED]

around when the kids had seatwork helping them, that I was the one who typed up notes for the non-readers in the class, and that I was always pulling study guides off the internet to help supplement her lackluster lectures....guides that she never used.

[REDACTED]

I stood up for myself in the meeting to an extent, even when this evil wench questioned me (questions to which I knew the answers to, therefore making her point moot), but after awhile I felt sick & just started crying. I was too weak inside to stand up anymore. I was also afraid that if I did stand up, at that moment I might've started spouted obscenities, which I have been known to do on occasion.

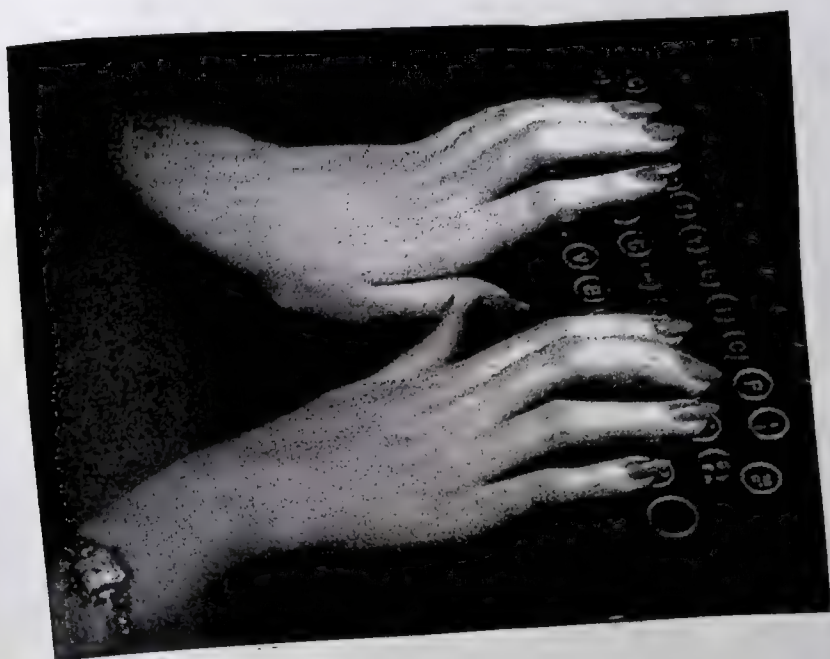
[REDACTED]

12

I broke out in hives. I went home after work & cried & screamed into my pillow. All I wanted was to be treated nicely & considerately. All I wanted was someone to hug me & tell me that it was alright.



Oh yes, I mentioned surgery. Many women have abnormal pap test results; I have had several in the 10 years I've been getting exams. But on the second pap smear whatever it was disappeared, so it was business as usual until the next annual exam.

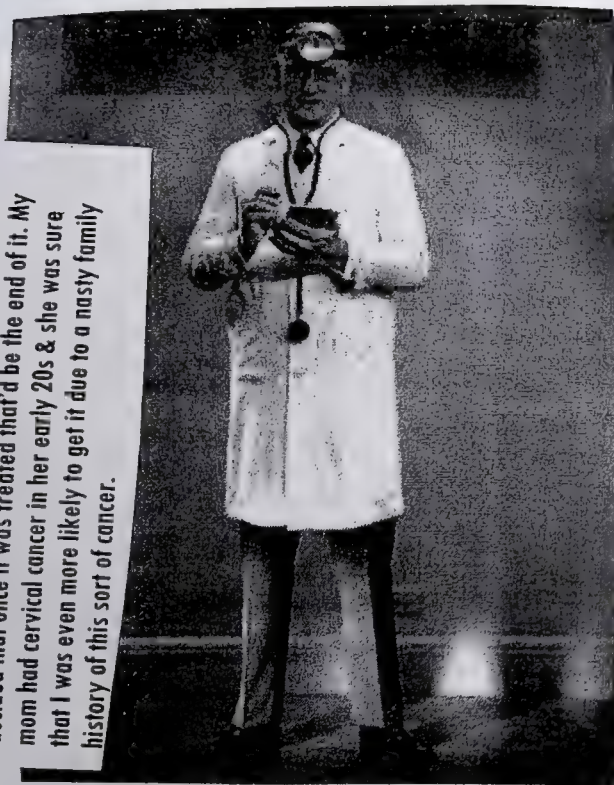


However, after two abnormal pap smears between August & February I went into the doctor's office for another procedure where the doctor opens me up & looks inside me with some sort of scope as a nurse watches on. Ten minutes of shame in the stirrups again.

13.

The results of that showed that I had severe dysplasia, which meant that I had renegade cells growing in my cervix. If left untreated they could eventually (years and years down the road) turn into cervical cancer.

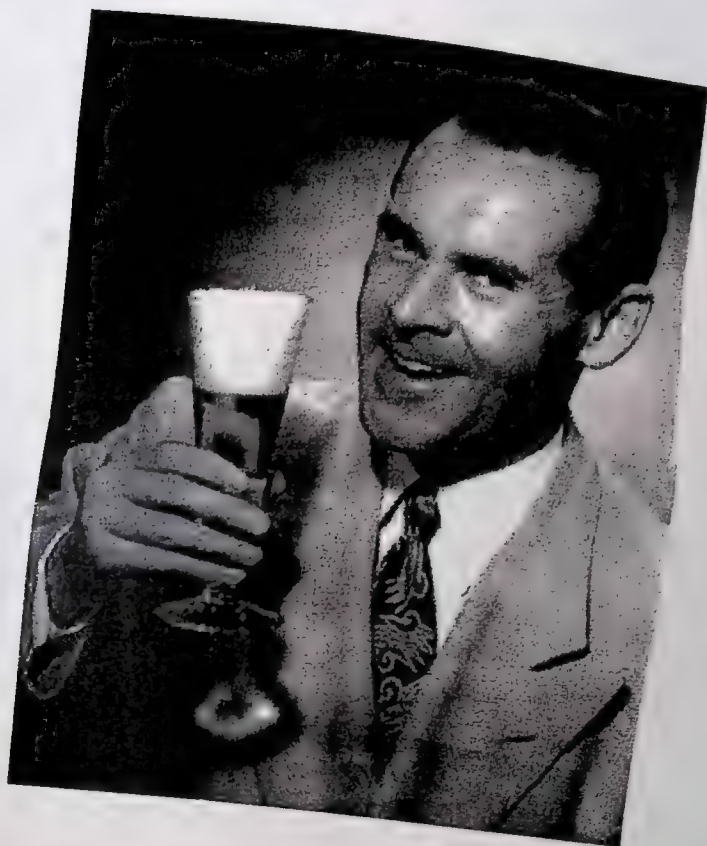
I broke down & told Ma what was going on since it involved some surgery. She didn't take the news so well, whereas I decided that once it was treated that'd be the end of it. My mom had cervical cancer in her early 20s & she was sure that I was even more likely to get it due to a nasty family history of this sort of cancer.



14 And to me, the whole thing wasn't a big deal. What they did was a LEEP, which involves cutting tissue with a low-voltage electrified wire loop. I suppose it might've been painful had I not been anesthetized & I would've been more embarrassed for the same reasons. After all, when I fell asleep there at least a half a dozen people in the room. Half a dozen people looking at my nether-regions. (No comments from the peanut gallery, please.)



So I bled for about 3 weeks post-surgery. I had a few cramps.



I broke out from an unknown allergy to percocet.

Other than that, I'm healing nicely. The doctor said I could "get back to whatever it is that you normally do."

Good Things

full of love  
+ spirit

Chai tea  
tomatoes  
mail

Warm  
Weather  
Walking  
buddies

Painted nails

Being  
Happy

16



april 6

I have an interview for the criminal justice instructor job tomorrow afternoon. I'm pretty excited about it, let's hope they hire me! If that happens prior to the school year ending I'll probably be moved to the shit list. Marie came to me the other day so that I could spend some extra money in the sped account on things & told me again she hopes I come back next year. I don't even think I said anything in response, I just buried myself in the catalog. Oops.

Yesterday afternoon the guy came to photograph me & some things for the paper. I knew if I let my mom stay in the room she would interfere. I know she's trying to help but it's still slightly annoying.

Spring is in the air, which means fights will be breaking out at school. Yesterday there was one in the cafeteria & the only thing of it I saw was two cops racing into the building. Still, I'm not scared to work here.

My arm is peeling, hooray! That reminds me, I forgot to post a photo.

17



20

**Thursday, March 31, 2005**

mopeds


Sometimes it's crazy for someone who's never met you to reveal a mental image of you.

"I can picture you on a moped, wearing big goggles and a long scarf trailing out behind you, and little mentally challenged kids laughing and chasing you down the street. I don't know why I have that image in my head, but mopeds get really great gas mileage."

I can totally see that, except for the part about the kids chasing me. That's just kind of odd.

I finally traded in my gas-guzzling SUV for an 05 Corolla this week. I'll be saving \$100/month on the payment & whatever the difference in gas is. Score!

Sherri also cut & colored my hair yesterday & it looks awesome! I'm really pleased with it!





@ 2005-04-11 08:35:00



It's really too pretty of a day to be inside. Ah, spring fever.

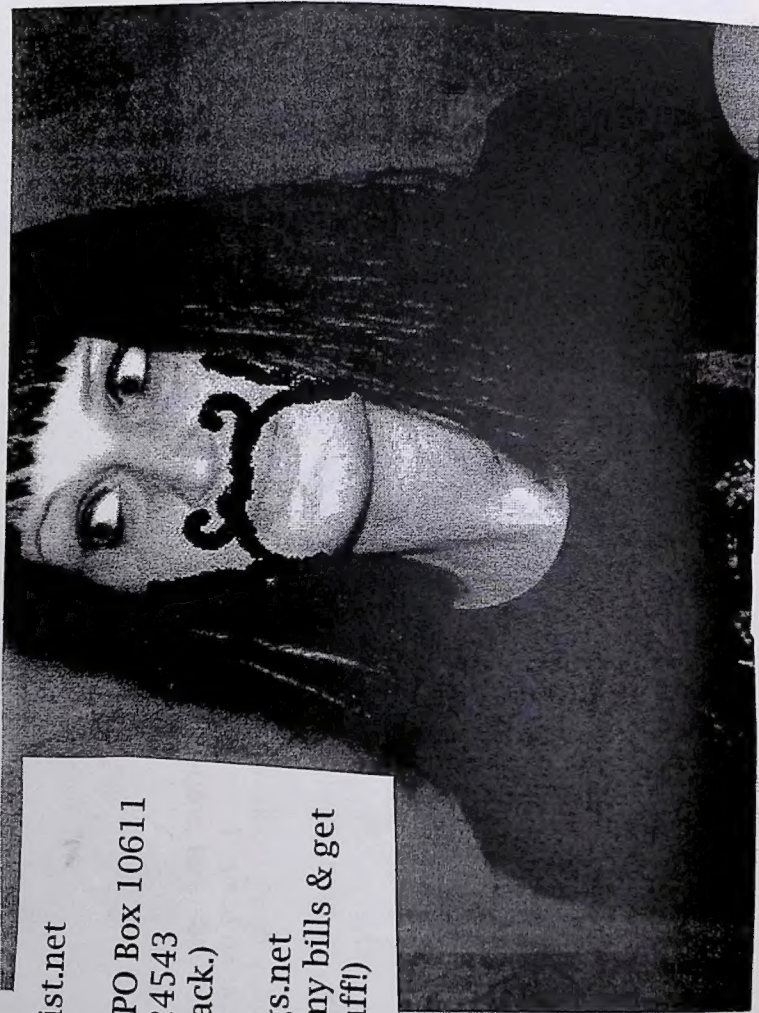
My principal gave me a good evaluation for the year, commenting that I had "handled some very difficult situations very well this year." Now, if I could just hear something about that crj job I'd be happy.

Not that I'll be able to move anytime soon, but I've been looking at homes for sale in this area online. I found some really cute new houses the other day in the \$70,000's, but I didn't recognize the area. I knew there had to be some catch, and there was. The development was put in the middle of one of the most impoverished areas of town through a grant. I'm not sure if they're Section 8 or what, but they had private realtors.

I really need to start saving money so that eventually I'll be able to move closer to town. Now that my mom is divorcing Boyd I don't feel as "tied" to that house and property as I used to.



Let's see if my Cool mustache  
earns the  
respect of my peers.



deadsociologist.net

Send mail to: PO Box 10611  
Danville, VA 24543  
(I'll write ya back.)

theprettythings.net  
(help me pay my bills & get  
some great stuff!)